

Omicron surge is undermining care for other health problems

By BEN FINLEY and KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

Roger Strukhoff was being treated for intestinal bleeding at a hospital outside Chicago this month when he suffered a mild heart attack.

Normally, the 67-year-old would have been sent to the intensive care unit. But Strukhoff said it was overrun with COVID-19 patients, and the staff instead had to wheel a heart monitor into his room and quickly administer nitroglycerin and morphine.

"A doctor I know pretty well said, 'Roger, we're going to have to improvise right here,'" said Strukhoff, who lives in DeKalb, Illinois.

The omicron surge this winter has not only swamped U.S. hospitals with record numbers of patients with COVID-19, it has also caused frightening moments and major headaches for people trying to get treatment for other ailments.

Less-urgent procedures have been put on hold around the country, such as cochlear implant surgery



ies and steroid injections for rheumatoid arthritis. And people with all sorts of medical complaints have had to wait in emergency rooms for hours longer than usual.

Mat Gleason said he

wheeled his 92-year-old father, Eugene Gleason, into a Los Angeles-area emergency room last week for a transfusion to treat a blood disorder. It should have taken about seven to 10 hours, Gleason said, but his dad

was there for 48 hours.

He said his father called him after 10 hours, asking for a blanket.

"He told me later, 'I just assumed they forgot about me,'" said Gleason, 57, who works as an art critic. "And

yet he wasn't the only person in that room. There were dozens of people" But Gleason added: "I'm not begrudging the hospital at all. They did a great job."

Continued on next page

LIVE ENTERTAINMENT 7 DAYS A WEEK

SUNDAY:	MONDAY:	TUESDAY:	WEDNESDAY:	THURSDAY:	FRIDAY:	SATURDAY:
TICO KOCK STEEL DRUM 4 - 6pm	ANGELA FLORES VIOLINIST 6:30 - 8:30pm	JEAN PAUL SAXOPHONIST 6:30 - 8:30pm	PAULA RIDERSTAP SINGER 6:30 - 8:30pm	RICKY THOMAS GUITAR 7 - 9pm	RICKY THOMAS GUITAR 7 - 9pm	ANGELA FLORES VIOLINIST 6:30 - 8:30pm
PAULA RIDERSTAP SINGER 6:30 - 8:30pm	Happy Hour 12 - 1 / 4 - 6 / 9 - 10	*** PREMIUM BRANDS ***	KARAOKE HAPPY HOUR 9:00 - 11:00pm	costa linda beach resort	WATER'S EDGE RESTAURANT & BAR	

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Locations: **The Cove Mall** (8:00 AM - 6:00 PM) **Medcare near Courtyard by Marriott** (8:00 AM - 2:00 PM)

Continued from Front

An average of almost 144,000 people were in the hospital in the U.S. with COVID-19 as of Tuesday, the highest level on record, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Hospitals in a few states such as New York and Connecticut that experienced early omicron surges are starting to see an easing of the patient load, but many other places are overwhelmed.

Hospitals say the COVID-19 patients aren't as sick as those during the last surge. And many of them are being admitted for reasons other than COVID-19 and only incidentally testing positive for the virus.

Rick Pollack, CEO and president of the American Hospital Association, said the surge has had a widespread effect on the availability of care for people who have non-COVID-19 health problems. He said a number of factors are

at play: More people are in the hospital, and a high number of health care workers are out with COVID-19, worsening staffing shortages that existed well before the pandemic.

As of Wednesday, roughly 23% of hospitals nationwide were reporting critical staff shortages, Pollack said.

Many people are also unable or unwilling to seek care for symptoms that do not seem like emergencies, he said. Pollack said that has led to delays in diagnosing conditions such as diabetes or high blood pressure that get worse the longer they go untreated. Dr. Claudia Fegan, chief medical officer for Cook County Health in Chicago, said some people, particularly older patients, have been avoiding checkups and other routine care during the pandemic out of fear of COVID-19.

And as a result, "the patients we're seeing now are much sicker," she said,

citing cases of advanced heart failure and cancer that might have been diagnosed earlier.

Mike Bawden, a 59-year-old marketing consultant with a history of blood clots in his lungs, said he couldn't get an appointment to see his doctor in Davenport, Iowa, because his coughing symptoms were too similar to COVID-19. The doctor's office was concerned about the virus spreading to others.

After nearly two weeks, Bawden went to a walk-in clinic, which sent him to the emergency room at Genesis Medical Center-East in Davenport. He said he waited almost six hours in an overflowing ER before he was seen. A scan showed clots in his lungs, as he suspected, and he was prescribed blood thinners. If not for the surge, Bawden said, he would have gotten a scan much earlier at a doctor's office.

"It's always so easy to Mon-

day morning quarterback the ER, but everyone was really nice — even the other patients," Bawden said. "I think it's important for folks to realize that nobody's the villain." Craig Cooper, a Genesis spokesman, declined to comment on any individual cases. But he said in an email: "We are not exempt from the challenges medical centers across the United States are experiencing because of significant impact from COVID. We urge individuals to get vaccinated."

Strukhoff, who is a researcher for tech startups, said he arrived at Northwestern Medicine Kishwaukee Hospital in DeKalb for what he suspected was internal bleeding.

He was diagnosed and given a bed in the emergency room. He waited there for six hours, feeling dizzy, before he was wheeled to his own room through hallways where people lay on stretchers.

"I was in no distress at that point," Strukhoff said. "I was worried about clogging up the works in the emergency room and taking up a spot for other people."

Christopher King, a spokesman for Northwestern Medicine, declined to comment on Strukhoff's care because of privacy laws. But he confirmed that wait times were higher than normal throughout the hospital system, as they are across the country.

Strukhoff said that once he got his own hospital room, a colonoscopy revealed the bleeding. Doctors treated it by cauterizing a vein. He then suffered the heart attack while he was recovering. He said it took five hours for him to get into the ICU.

"It's not something they were set up to do, but they did it," Strukhoff said of the doctors and nurses who rose to the challenge. "These people are heroes." □

Alex Murdaugh now faces 71 charges; \$8.5M stolen

By **JEFFREY COLLINS Associated Press**

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) —

A once-prominent South Carolina lawyer now faces 71 charges that he stole nearly \$8.5 million in wrongful death and wreck settlements from more than a dozen people after another round of indictments against Alex Murdaugh were handed up Friday.

The 23 new charges issued by the state grand jury covered new victims but similar schemes, prosecutors said. Murdaugh, 53, would negotiate settlement money for his clients without telling them what they earned, then deposit the checks meant to pay for their pain and suffering or the anguish of the death of a loved one into his own personal accounts — paying off loans or debts or in ways prosecutors have not detailed. The new indictments extend Murdaugh's crimes back more than a decade to 2011 and add a new mystery. Several of them said Murdaugh used money orders given to an unnamed family member to get his hands on the cash,



prosecutors said.

Murdaugh has been in jail since October for the ever-growing list of breach of trust, forgery, money laundering and computer crime charges. A judge set his bail at \$7 million and refused to reduce it, even as Murdaugh's lawyer argued his bank accounts were seized in civil lawsuits and he could barely afford to buy underwear at the Richland County jail. He has blamed his problems on

years of drug addiction.

Murdaugh's professional career began to unravel after his 52-year-old wife, Maggie, and 22-year-old son, Paul, were killed in a shooting at the family's home in June. Murdaugh's lawyers have adamantly said he had nothing to do with it and repeatedly said they hope investigators are working as hard to find their killers as they are untangling Alex Murdaugh's finances.

Murdaugh is the fourth generation of a prominent legal family in tiny Hampton County. His great-grandfather, grandfather and father were all elected prosecutors and his family helped run the biggest law firm in the county for a century.

Friday's indictments include charges for Murdaugh's handling of the aftermath of a wreck that caused a deaf man to end up quadriplegic.

Murdaugh took a \$309,000 check he was supposed to give to Hakeem Pinckney's family and instead bought money orders that went to cover money he took from the accounts of other clients, to pay down a loan and get cash for himself and an unnamed family member, according to the indictment.

Then when Pinckney died in a nursing home from the lingering effects of his injuries, Murdaugh got an additional \$89,000 settlement on Pinckney's behalf, but deposited that check in his account without ever telling the man's family, prosecutors said.

The lawyer for the Pinckney family said the transactions are complex and hard to follow and even more money may have been stolen. Prosecutors have suggested at Murdaugh's bond hearing that they still haven't gotten to the bottom of his shady practices. Pinckney was Black, and most of the people Murdaugh stole from were like him — minorities and not well off, family attorney Justin Bamberg said. □

Preteens may be vaxed without parents under California bill

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP)

— California would allow children age 12 and up to be vaccinated without their parents' consent, the youngest age of any state, under a proposal late Thursday by a state senator.

Alabama allows such decisions at age 14, Oregon at 15, Rhode Island and South Carolina at 16, according to Sen. Scott Wiener, a Democrat from San Francisco who is proposing the change. Only Washington, D.C., has a lower limit, at age 11.

Wiener argued that California already allows those 12 and up to consent to the Hepatitis B and Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccines, and to treatment for sexually transmitted infections, substance abuse and mental health disorders.

"Giving young people the autonomy to receive life-saving vaccines, regardless of their parents' beliefs or work schedules, is essential for their physical and mental health," he said. "It's unconscionable for teens to be blocked from the vaccine because a parent either refuses or cannot take their child to a vaccination



site."

Currently in California, minors ages 12 to 17 cannot be vaccinated without permission from their parents or guardian, unless the vaccine is specifically to prevent a sexually transmitted disease.

Wiener's bill would lift the parental requirement for that age group for any vaccine that has been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention.

That includes immunizations against the coronavirus, but Wiener said vaccine hesitancy and misinformation has also deterred vaccinations against measles and other contagious diseases that can then spread among youths whose parents won't agree to have them vaccinated.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom in October announced the nation's first coronavirus vaccine man-

date for schoolchildren. But it likely won't take effect until later this year and allows exemptions for medical reasons, religious and personal beliefs — though lawmakers may try to limit non-medical reasons.

Wiener's legislation is permissive, not a mandate, but any vaccination legislation has been hugely controversial in California and elsewhere.

Even before the pandemic, busloads of opponents

filled the Capitol and lined up for hours to protest bills lifting religious and personal beliefs for the 10 vaccines already required of school children.

And in September, more than a thousand people rallied outside the state Capitol to oppose vaccine mandates, even though lawmakers had postponed their consideration of legislation requiring that workers either be vaccinated or get weekly coronavirus testing to keep their jobs.

"This to me seems to be another example of Democrats wanting to remove parents from the equation," said Republican Assemblyman James Gallagher. "I think that's flawed policy. I think parents are vital to these decisions."

However, he thinks Wiener may have difficulty even in a Legislature overwhelmingly controlled by Democrats.

"I think there will be bipartisan support for the proposition that parents should be involved in their kids' health care decisions, in deciding what types of medical care and drugs they should be taking," Gallagher said. □

Rare blast of snow, ice takes aim at Southeast US coast

By **BEN FINLEY**
Associated Press

NORFOLK, Va. (AP) — Salt spreader trucks crisscrossed coastal roads as courthouses and schools closed Friday to prepare for a snow and ice storm expected to snarl parts of the Carolinas and Virginia unaccustomed to winter precipitation.

Authorities along a stretch of the North and South Carolina coast warned that ice accumulation could cause power major power outages, while areas northeast of there stretching into Virginia could see several inches of snow. School districts in the pathway canceled class or went to remote learning, while two large coastal military bases modified operations. Fifty-seven courthouses from the central part of North Carolina to the coast closed for

modified operations due to the forecast.

Transportation officials in the southeast corner of Virginia said Friday morning that crews had been working overnight to treat the roads, but warned people to stay off of them.

"Road temps are below freezing on all roads in the area, which means high potential for slick spots, black ice and slushy conditions. Stay home where it's safe and warm, unless travel is unavoidable," the Virginia Department of Transportation's Hampton Roads District said in a tweet.

Forecasters predict four to six inches (10 to 15 centimeters) of snow in the northeastern corner of North Carolina and Virginia's Hampton Roads region, which includes Norfolk and Virginia Beach.

"Untreated roads will be

slick, and treated roads will probably get slick overnight," said Mike Montefusco, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Wakefield, Virginia. He advised motorists to delay travel until later in the weekend.

Chris Stokes, 41, a construction worker who lives in Norfolk, stocked up at a Harris Teeter grocery store Friday morning, rounding out his provisions with bottled water, eggs, chicken, wine and other items.

"I already had a couple of things, but now they're making it seem like it's gonna be a lot worse," Stokes said.

School was canceled for his kids. His construction jobs were on hold. Stokes' plan was to put some chicken in the slow cooker and assemble some toys that his kids got for Christmas.

"I bought some salt, so I'll sprinkle that outside the walkway and just kind of brace for it," Stokes said.

"Luckily, I got a 4-wheel drive (pickup truck)," he added. "So, if anything happens I'm not stuck for real. I can probably make it to where I need to go. But I'm sure nothing will be open."

In North Carolina, the heaviest amounts of ice will likely develop near New Bern, where US Routes 17 and 70 cross, said Ryan Ellis, the science and operations officer for the National Weather Service office in Newport/Morehead City.

"We could see up to a half an inch of ice there, and with that amount you're really starting to get into concerns about power outages," Ellis said. Ice will be a concern along the coast from Jacksonville, North

Carolina, to the northeastern corner of South Carolina.

The governors in North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia each declared states of emergency ahead of the storm. North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper said 114 National Guard troops were staging and ready to move to affected areas, with extended power outages from ice accumulation a concern.

In South Carolina, where Gov. Henry McMaster also declared a state of emergency, schools and government offices around Charleston and other places that don't see much frozen precipitation closed or announced shortened hours Friday. Freezing rain, sleet and snow were expected to start spreading across the state around sunrise. □

Retiring FDNY commissioner led COVID response, 9/11 recovery

By **MICHAEL R. SISAK**

NEW YORK (AP) — New York City's fire commissioner said Friday that he will retire next month after more than seven years in the job and a career that spanned more than five decades and included stints in every rank in the department.

Daniel Nigro led the nation's largest municipal fire department through the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic and recently oversaw its response to the city's deadliest fire in three decades.

With the FDNY's ranks decimated by the deaths of 343 firefighters and fire officials in the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, Nigro received a battlefield promotion to chief of department. He led rescue and recovery operations at ground zero and helped the department rebuild.

Nigro, one of the few holdovers from former Mayor Bill de Blasio's administration, will leave Feb. 16.

Mayor Eric Adams, who took office Jan. 1 and was with Nigro at the scene of a Bronx apartment blaze that killed 17 people on Jan. 9, called the retiring commis-



sioner a "tireless champion for New Yorkers, and a friend who I've leaned on time and again."

"From overseeing the heroic 9/11 rescue and recovery efforts to leading the FDNY's unwavering response during the pandemic, Dan has worked tirelessly to protect all New Yorkers," Adams said in a statement.

"New Yorkers, whether they know it or not, are all safer because of the work he's done and owe him their thanks. Dan defines public

service and will be deeply missed by me and the entire department."

Nigro, 73, joined the FDNY as a firefighter in 1969. He retired as chief of department in 2002 and returned as commissioner in June 2014.

Nigro is one of six people to hold every rank in the department. His father, also named Daniel, worked for the fire department for 33 years.

"Since the day I raised my right hand 53 years ago and followed my father

into the greatest fire department in the world, I have been blessed, privileged, and truly honored to serve the people of our great city," Nigro said.

As commissioner, Nigro continued a 16-year streak of fewer than 100 fire deaths in the city per year, expanding fire safety education efforts, installing alarms, and turning tragedies, like the Bronx blaze, into teachable moments so they don't happen again. Nigro also sought to diversify the department and end

pervasive racism in its ranks. Last October, he suspended nine firefighters without pay in connection with a string of racist messages and memes they shared on their phones, including ones that mocked the Minneapolis police killing of George Floyd.

The fire department called the suspensions the most severe punishments ever handed down in the history of the Fire Department of the City of New York, but some Black firefighters said they didn't go far enough.

At the same time, the department said it has welcomed historically diverse classes into its academy and now has more women and firefighters of color than ever before.

Nigro's biggest challenge as commissioner was leading the fire department through the chaotic, early days of the pandemic — the busiest stretch in the history of the city's EMS operation. For a time, FDNY ambulances were responding to about 6,000 calls a day — more than 50% more than average and far exceeding the demand on 9/11. □

Native American tribe, New Mexico ink water leasing deal

By **SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN** Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP)

— A Native American tribe has agreed to lease more of its water to help address dwindling supplies in the Colorado River Basin, officials announced Thursday. The agreement involves the Jicarilla Apache Nation, the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission and The Nature Conservancy.

The tribe has agreed to lease up to 6.5 billion gallons (25 billion liters) of water per year to the state to bolster flows for endangered species and increase water security for New Mexico.

The water would be released from the Navajo Reservoir in northwestern New Mexico to feed the San Juan River, which flows into the Colorado River.

New Mexico is among the

seven Western states that rely on the Colorado River. Water managers elsewhere already have had to come up with contingency plans as less snow, warmer temperatures and water lost to evaporation have affected the river's ability to meet demands.

Daryl Vigil, the Jicarilla Apache Nation's water administrator, highlighted the need for creative solutions as pressure grows across the drought-stricken basin. He pointed to the benefits of meaningful cooperation with Native American communities, saying this novel project could serve as a model for other tribes and opens the door to broader conversations as officials try to chart out guidelines for future operations of the Colorado River.

The goal is to create flexibility across sovereign jurisdictions to get water to where

it needs to be, Vigil said.

"It's about building a future together," he said. "This sets the stage for that."

Not all tribes in the basin have legal authority to lease water. Some tribes in Arizona already have played a significant role in shoring up water supplies as that state deals with mandatory cuts to its Colorado River allocation. The Jicarilla Apache Nation's water rights support the tribe's cultural practices and economy while ensuring residents have water to drink.

The tribe subleases most of its water to other users. For several decades, that has included coal-fired power plants in the region through long-term contracts that provided a steady source of revenue. With the plants facing closure, officials said that presented an opportunity for the Jicarilla Apache

Nation, New Mexico and the environmental group to strike a new deal that ensured the water would be put to use and that the tribe would be compensated.

"The Colorado River Basin's tribal nations are among the most important leaders and partners in efforts to find lasting solutions to the pressing water scarcity and ecological challenges that face the millions of people who rely on this incredible river," said Celene Hawkins, a tribal engagement program director for The Nature Conservancy.

Vigil said the San Juan River was among the hardest hit tributaries last year. While snowpack this winter has been promising, he said officials still need to prepare. "We've been living adaptively for thousands of years. Let us show you how it's done," he said. □



Latin America, Asia, latest to get hit with omicron surge

By JAVIER CÓRDOBA and CHRISTOPHER SHERMAN Associated Press

SAN JOSE, Costa Rica (AP)

— In Costa Rica, officials are encouraging those infected with the coronavirus to skip voting in upcoming national elections. On the other side of the world, Beijing is locking down residential communities as the country anxiously awaits the start of the Winter Olympics on Feb. 4.

In Latin America and Asia, where the omicron variant is making its latest appearance, some countries are imposing such restrictions while others are loath to place new limits on populations already exhausted by previous constraints.

Omicron quickly swept through the places it first hit, such as South Africa, the U.K. and the United States, pushing daily cases far higher than at any time during the pandemic.

The Americas reported nearly 7.2 million new COVID infections and more than 15,000 COVID-related deaths over the past week, the Pan American Health Organization said Wednesday. Coronavirus infections across the Americas almost doubled between Jan. 1 and Jan. 8, from 3.4 million cases to 6.1 million, PAHO said.

Infections are accelerating in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia and Peru, and hospitalizations are rising in Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay, said PAHO Director Carissa Etienne. The Caribbean islands are experiencing their steepest increase in



COVID-19 cases since the start of the pandemic, Etienne noted.

"Although omicron infections appear to be milder, we continue to urge caution because the virus is spreading more actively than ever before," Etienne said.

Infections are also increasing in Asia, including in the Philippines, which has seen its worst coronavirus outbreak in recent weeks.

Countries in both regions are searching for a mix of restrictions that their exhausted populations will accept and that won't inflict undue damage on their economies.

"We're already going on three years of the pandemic and the population is tired," said Brazil's president of the Council of State Health Secretariats, Carlos Lula. "There is no space for

many restrictions. We're going to have to face a third wave with precautions like masking, distancing and vaccination."

Argentina and Mexico also have largely ruled out imposing any national restrictions, instead banking on their vaccination campaigns and the apparently less severe symptoms of the omicron variant.

Mexico President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, having just emerged from a week of isolation after his second coronavirus infection in the past year, downplayed the threat. "It is demonstrable that this variant does not have the same seriousness as the earlier, the delta," López Obrador said this week.

Antonio Pérez, 67, runs a small stand in a Mexico City market selling notebooks, pens and other school

supplies. He was forced to shutter his shop for three months early in the pandemic, rocking him financially. But he agreed with the government's decision then a time when little was known about the virus's spread and no one was vaccinated and with the hands-off approach now, when most of the population is vaccinated and there is less pressure on hospitals. Immunization, masks and social distancing are the way to go now, he said, speaking through his own N95 mask.

"I don't think you can do anything else."

Some states in Brazil have reimposed restrictions but stopped short of closing down businesses as they did last year. Peru, however, has revived a nationwide curfew, and Ecuador has banned public and pri-

vate events or large gatherings of any kind.

In Costa Rica, public health concerns are colliding with constitutional guarantees for the Feb. 6 presidential and congressional elections. Authorities concede they can't stop people from voting, but Eugenia Zamora, president of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, recently told news outlets that those who test positive for coronavirus should "abstain" from going out to vote.

Demographer Luis Rosero said that according to his projections, the new wave of infections could peak right around election day. Under current health protocols, those who test positive in Costa Rica are obligated to isolate.

Costa Rica's daily confirmed infection totals have risen from fewer than 100 in December to more than 5,000 this month. So far, however, the government has imposed few restrictions, such as requiring soccer clubs to play without fans.

Two other Central American countries, Panama and Honduras, have not imposed any restrictions despite seeing their cases more than double during the past week.

Puerto Rico, among the hardest-hit places in the Caribbean amid the region's current surge, tightened restrictions again this month after the U.S. territory saw its COVID-19 test positivity rate jump from 5% late last year to more than 40% in recent weeks. □

Romania hits pandemic record of nearly 20,000 infections

By STEPHEN McGRATH Associated Press

BUCHAREST, Romania (AP) — Romania on Friday hit a new pandemic record of 19,649 COVID-19 infections amid a rapid rise of cases, but hospitalizations and deaths remain significantly lower compared to the previous wave, official data shows.

Just a month ago Romania was registering fewer than a thousand coronavirus infections a day. But daily cases have skyrocketed since

the emergence of the highly transmissible omicron variant.

Despite the record case number, only 49 deaths were reported, compared with several hundred a day during October and November. Of the 49, 43 were unvaccinated, authorities said.

The head of Romania's Department for Emergency Situations, Raed Arafat, told a news conference Thursday that vaccination "remains the solution to avoid serious illness."

"Unfortunately, none of the young people who died in the last 24 hours were vaccinated," he said. "And the percentage of those who die, of those who are in (ICUs), are mostly unvaccinated people, a situation that could have been prevented if they were vaccinated." Romania is the EU's second-least vaccinated nation against COVID-19, with just 49% of adults being double-jabbed against COVID-19, compared with a bloc average of 80%. Over the past week, Romania

has administered fewer than 20,000 jabs a day, official data shows.

Dragos Zaharia, a primary care doctor at the Marius Nasta Institute of Pneumology in Bucharest, said it's a "big relief" that outpatient evaluations in his hospital are this time resulting in "a minimal number of admissions." "The cases are much less severe than in the delta wave. I am not expecting a big impact on hospitalizations and deaths," he told The Associated Press. "It seems the pandemic end is near." □

Has rule-breaker Boris Johnson met his match in 'partygate'?

By JILL LAWLESS
Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — For Boris Johnson, facts have always been flexible.

The British prime minister's career is littered with doctored quotes, tall tales, exaggerations and mistruths. When called out, he has generally offered an apologetic shrug or a guilty grin, and moved on. Plenty of people were willing to forgive him.

At least until now. Revelations that the prime minister and his staff partied while Britain was under coronavirus restrictions have provoked public outrage and prompted many in the Conservative Party to consider dumping their leader. The Conservatives picked Johnson because his image as a cheerful rule-breaker the naughty schoolboy of British politics gave him a rare ability to connect with voters. Now, many are having second thoughts.

"His fans would say he's a force of nature he doesn't let things get in his way," said Steven Fielding, professor of political history at the University of Nottingham.

"Sometimes he's been caught out, but mostly he's got away with it," Fielding added. "Now the reality is becoming more apparent to more and more people." Johnson has often been able to talk his way out



of crises. The Oxford-educated politician has used words to create the image of a rumpled jokester with a mop of blond hair who doesn't take himself too seriously. Quips and jokes tumble out of him, sometimes in Latin or ancient Greek.

That persona made Johnson a popular guest on the humorous TV show "Have I Got News for You" from the late 1990s onwards, and brought him global fame as London's boosterish mayor between 2008 and 2016.

Many people thought he was too lightweight ever

to become prime minister, and Johnson didn't contradict them. He disguised his ambition with jokes, saying he had as much chance of becoming prime minister as of "finding Elvis on Mars" or being "reincarnated as an olive."

In fact, he had long dreamed of power. His sister Rachel Johnson has said his childhood ambition was to be "world king." But his route to the top was haphazard.

As a young journalist at The Times of London, he fabricated a quote about King Edward II from a historian,

who also happened to be his godfather. He was fired, but that didn't stop him becoming Brussels correspondent for the Daily Telegraph in the early 1990s, filing exaggerated stories of EU waste and red tape. Those "Euromyths" about one-size-fits-all condoms and plans to ban "bendy bananas" helped turn British opinion against the bloc, and ultimately led to Johnson becoming the Brexit champion who would years later bring the U.K. out of the EU. Brexit was won in a 2016 referendum campaign that contained many question-

able claims, notably the allegation often repeated by Johnson that Britain gave the EU 350 million pounds a week that could instead be spent on the U.K.'s health service.

Johnson suffered an early political setback when then-Conservative leader Michael Howard fired him in 2004 for lying about an extramarital affair. A month earlier, Howard forced him to apologize to the city of Liverpool for accusing its residents of "wallowing" in victimhood.

Opponents long argued that Johnson's loose grasp of facts and history of glibly offensive comments made him unfit for high office. Over the years Johnson has called Papua New Guineans cannibals, claimed that "part Kenyan" Barack Obama had an ancestral dislike of Britain and compared Muslim women who wear face-covering veils to "letter boxes."

Johnson has usually responded by dismissing offensive comments as jokes, or by accusing journalists of dredging up long-ago remarks. Attacking the media — along with "lefty London lawyers" — is a long-standing populist tactic of Johnson. His biographer Andrew Gimson has called him the "Merry England PM" who depicts his opponents as joyless puritans. □

Chile's incoming cabinet: Women, youth and a nod to markets

By EVA VERGARA

SANTIAGO, Chile (AP) — Chile's millennial, leftist President-elect Gabriel Boric announced his first cabinet on Friday, giving a majority of posts to women and several to former student protest leaders while also

reassuring markets by naming the Central Bank chief as finance minister.

Fourteen of the 24 new ministers are women, including Defense Minister Maya Fernández a granddaughter of Socialist President Salvador Allende, who was

overthrown by a military coup in 1973.

The Interior Ministry that oversees domestic security will go to Dr. Izkia Siches, who was recently head of the national medical association.

Communist Party legislator Camila Vallejo, who like Boric rose to prominence as a student leader, will be the government spokesperson. The Finance Ministry goes to Mario Marcel, whose term as Central Bank president was widely praised by financial analysts. He had earlier worked at the World Bank, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and in

previous center-left Chilean governments.

"It is a very important signal of moderation and commitment to fiscal equilibrium," said Loreto Cox of the School of Government at Chile's Catholic University. Following the announcement, Chile's peso rose against the dollar and the local stock market surged a sharp contrast with plunges for both in the wake of Boric's election victory in December.

Boric will turn 36 before taking office on March 11 and his cabinet includes at least six ministers under the age of 40, including those who led a wave of pro-

tests in 2011 for improved, free education. Among those is Congressman Giorgio Jackson of Boric's own Broad Front coalition who was named secretary general of the presidency.

"We have formed this team with people who are prepared, with knowledge, with experience, and committed to the agenda of changes that the country needs," Boric said.

Boric has called for modernizing Chile's public health sector, which serves 80% of the population, replacing the now-private run pension system while raising benefits and increasing the minimum wage. □



Japan widens virus restrictions as omicron surges in cities

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Restaurants and bars will close early in Tokyo and a dozen other areas across Japan beginning Friday as the country widens COVID-19 restrictions due to the omicron variant, which has caused cases to surge to new highs in metropolitan areas.

The restraint, which is something of a pre-state of emergency, is the first since September and is scheduled to last through Feb. 13. With three other prefectures — Okinawa, Hiroshima and Yamaguchi — under similar measures since early January, the state of restraint now covers 16 areas, or one-third of the country.

While many Japanese adults are fully vaccinated against COVID-19, few have gotten a booster shot, which has been a vital protection from the highly contagious omicron variant of the coronavirus.

The Health Ministry on Friday approved Pfizer vaccinations for children aged 5-11, who are increasingly vulnerable to infection.

Throughout the pandemic, Japan has resisted the use



of lockdowns to limit the spread of the virus and has focused on requiring eateries to close early and not serve alcohol, and on urging the public to wear masks and practice social distancing, as the government seeks to minimize damage to the economy. Under the latest measures, most eateries are asked to close by 8 or 9 p.m., while large events can allow full capacity if they have anti-virus plans. In Tokyo, certi-

fied eateries that stop serving alcohol can stay open until 9 p.m. while those serving alcohol must close an hour earlier.

Restaurants that close at 9 p.m. and don't serve alcohol receive 30,000 yen (\$263) per day in government compensation, while those that close at 8 p.m. get 25,000 yen (\$220) per day.

Critics say the measures, which almost exclusively target bars and restau-

rants, make little sense and are unfair.

Mitsuru Saga, the manager of a Japanese-style "izakaya" restaurant in downtown Tokyo, said he chose to serve alcohol and close at 8 p.m. despite receiving less compensation from the government.

"We cannot make business without serving alcohol," Saga said in an interview with Nippon Television. "It seems only eateries are targeted for restraints."

Some experts question the effectiveness of placing restraints only on eateries, noting that infections show no signs of slowing in the three prefectures that have already been subjected to the measures for nearly two weeks.

After more than two years of repeated restraints and social distancing requests, Japanese are increasingly becoming less cooperative to such measures. People are back to commuting on packed trains and shopping at crowded stores.

Tokyo's main train station of Shinjuku was packed as usual with commuters rushing to work Friday morning. Japan briefly eased border controls in November but quickly reversed them to ban most foreign entrants when the omicron variant began spreading in other countries. Japan says it will stick to the stringent border policy through the end of February as the country tries to reinforce medical systems and treatment.

The tough border controls have triggered criticism from foreign students and scholars who say the measures are not scientific. □

Several return to live in Fukushima's last deserted town

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Several former residents of Futaba, the only remaining uninhabited town in Japan still recovering from effects of radiation from nuclear plant meltdowns in 2011, have returned to live for the first time since the massive earthquake and tsunami forced them out.

Authorities have declared most other areas safe and reopened them following extensive decontamination efforts over the past decade.

In Futaba, only 15 of 7,000 residents living there before the tragedy struck expressed their desire to return this week on a trial basis. A fully-fledged reopening of the town on Japan's northeastern coast is set for June.

"It's the first time in 10 years

and 10 months that I've seen running water come out," a beaming Yuji Onuma told NHK television. He said he looks forward to cooking fried noodles and eating with his wife and children when they start their lives back in town together later this month.

He was there alone briefly Friday with several others who in recent years have been gradually cleaning their homes during allowed daytime visits.

Another returnee, Yoichi Yatsuta, said he hoped town officials will pursue reconstruction to restore the life as much as possible to encourage younger people to come back.

Their town was the hardest hit when the nearby Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant went into meltdowns following the 9.0 magnitude quake that sent tsunami

waves washing over the coast, killing some 18,000 people, including more than 50 in Futaba.

Most of the remaining population were forced to evacuate to another town in Fukushima prefecture due to the radiation and contamination of the area, which has been largely deserted since.

While relocating, many of the former residents have found new jobs and community ties and say they have no interest in coming back.

A small section near the Futaba train station, which was cleaned and rebuilt, was opened for daytime visits in March last year, just before the Olympic torch relay ahead of the Tokyo Summer Games.

Futaba Mayor Shiro Izawa said the return on a trial basis "is a first step toward

Futaba town's reconstruction. I'm sure many town residents have long been waiting for this day."

There are no medical services or enough shops. For now, the residents must go out of town to find a hospital or shop for food and other daily necessities.

Izawa promised to provide ample support ahead of the formal lifting of part of the town's no-go zones in

June.

Prospects for a larger return are grim.

Futaba's registered residents already have decreased by nearly 2,000 from its pre-disaster population. Even after radiation levels declined to safe levels, the region's farming and fishing continue to be hurt by lingering concerns among consumers and retailers. □



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Weekly SPECIALS



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\$0.23

Pepperoni

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100 GR



SAVE
\$1.43

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\$1.42

Each



SAVE
\$6.29

Cherries Red

\$13.71

Per KG



SAVE
\$2.29

Flanksteak Brasil

\$7.94

Per KG



SAVE
\$4.05

\$3.94

Loinribs For Stew



SAVE
\$1.95

U.S. Nasi/Bami
Pork Cubes

\$5.42

Per KG



SAVE
\$2.81

U.S. Porkloin
Steaks

\$5.71

Per KG



SAVE
\$2.29

BBQ/Grill
Pork Sate

\$7.14

Per KG



SAVE
\$2.81

\$5.71

U.S. Pork Cutlets



SAVE
\$0.46

\$0.91

Corn
Yellow



SAVE
\$1.71

\$9.14

Extra Large Watermelon with
Seed (USA)

Each



\$4.57

Halo's

Per KG



SAVE
\$2.29

\$5.14

Ginger Root

Per KG



SAVE
\$0.28

\$8.57

Pea Sugar/Snap



SAVE
\$0.23

Mozzarella Loaf

\$0.89

100 GR



SAVE
\$0.11

Smoked Honey Ham

\$1.02

100 GR



SAVE
\$0.00

Mora Crispy Chicken Original 240gr

\$4.57

Each



SAVE
\$0.30

Remia Garlic Sauce/Shoarma Sauce 250ml

\$1.82

Each



SAVE
\$1.71

Bustelo Espresso Kcup 12ct

\$9.65

Each



SAVE
\$0.06

\$0.49

Kaasbol



SAVE
\$0.46

\$1.54

Croissant Ham/Kaas



SAVE
\$0.78

\$3.82

Belgioioso Asiago Pie
Cut Wedge 5oz



SAVE
\$0.49

\$1.99

EE Pineapple Slices
in Natural Juice 20oz



SAVE
\$0.57

\$1.42

Gwoon Soepgroenten
450gr



SAVE
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Old Spice Deodorant
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Covid Test Center at Paseo has the best experience!

PALM BEACH - Don't spend a single moment of your long awaited holiday in Aruba thinking about your return testing. The Covid Test Center Aruba located at the Paseo Herencia Mall is your travel ally. Just sit back and relax knowing that, when the time comes, their professional staff will make this process a breeze for you. No need to make an appointment or dread the nasal swab; you'll be done with it in a matter of minutes and back to fun stuff.

Some regions require proof or certification of negative COVID-19 status before allowing people into or out of the country. With rules and guidelines varying greatly from country to country, the safest approach is to have recent proof you are COVID-19 negative before you get to the airport. Covid Test Center @ Paseo provides both PCR and Antigen type testing with results within hours; and both are accepted by the CDC. Covid Test Center @ Paseo is conveniently located at

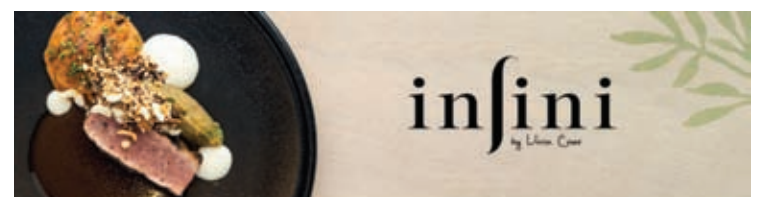
the Paseo Herencia Mall in the heart of the Palm Beach Strip and right across from the Playa Linda and Holiday Inn hotels; only two doors from T.G.I. Friday's. We are open seven days a week, between 9 am and 9 pm. This gives you the choice to walk in when it better suits you. It can be at the start or at the end of your day. No appointment needed here.

The friendly technicians at Covid Test Center @ Paseo will take your information as we are aware it is imperative that this shows accurately on the results. For a seamless process, please verify that you have provided the correct email to deliver the certificate. Said certificate can be printed at our offices should you wish to do so.

We understand that nobody enjoys doing a nasal swab. That is why we take pride in our reputation of being the gentlest swabbers on the island. First, we will not rush you just to go to the next in line. Through

clear given instructions we want you to feel comfortable. When you are ready, we will promptly but tenderly take a proper sample. Many elsewhere traumatized people praise the difference it makes to test with us.

Forget about counting hours before your flight, our turnaround is fast! For travel to the US, for example, a day before will suffice. A great game plan is to test first, then head out for an evening of dining, shopping and entertainment at the Paseo Herencia Mall, home of the water and lights show in the evenings. By the time you are back at the hotel, your results will be ready in your inbox. A PCR test costs \$75 and results are ready the next day, while Antigen test costs \$35 with same day results. If you are staying at an off-high-rise area property, you can benefit from the free parking our customers receive at the mall lot.). For more information follow us on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter. ☐



Taste limitless possibilities at Infini, where Chef Urvin Croes and his team explores without boundaries and steps with both feet outside of the box to create his most sensational dishes yet. This meticulously designed restaurant located inside Blue Residences on scenic Eagle Beach is a chef's table concept with limited seating where diners are able to interact with the staff and other guests alike throughout the evening.

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CPI for the period December 2020 - December 2021

ORANJESTAD — Consumer Price Index Over the last 12 months, the CPI increased by 3.6%. Ten (10) of the twelve (12) sectors registered increases in prices. The increases that had the greatest influence on the CPI were registered for the "Transport" (15.7%), "Household operation" (6.2%), "Food and non-alcoholic beverages" (4.3%) and "Recreation and culture" (3.4%) sectors, which contributed with an effect of 1.85, 0.58, 0.47 and 0.34 ppts, respectively.

The increases in the remaining sectors had an effect of 0.52 ppts on the CPI of December 2020 - December 2021. Aforementioned increases were partially offset by decreases in the indices for the "Health" (-2.7%) and "Communications" (-0.6%) sectors, causing an effect of -0.06 and -0.05 ppts, respectively. The increase in the "Transport" sector was mainly due to an increase in the category "Operation of personal transport equipment" (22.2%), which contributed to an effect of 1.56 ppts. The increase in the "Household operation" sector was mainly due to increases in the categories "Household appliances" (13.1%) and "Tools and equipment for house and garden" (33.0%), which contributed to an effect of 0.32 and 0.23 ppts, respectively. The increase in the "Food and non-alcoholic beverages" sector was mainly due to an increase in the category "Food" (4.6%), which contributed to an effect of 0.44 ppts. The increase in the "Recreation and culture" sector

was mainly due to an increase in the category "Audio-visual, photographic and information processing equipment" (39.5%), which contributed to an effect of 0.21 ppts. The decrease in the "Health" sector was mainly due to a decrease in the category "Medical products, appliances and equipment" (-2.7%), which contributed to an effect of -0.04 ppts. The decrease in the "Communications" sector was due to a decrease in the category "Telephone and telefax equipment" (-11.6%), which contributed to an effect of -0.05 ppts.

Consumption basket Over the last year

52.7% of the products in the consumption basket had an increase in price, causing an effect of 4.66 ppts, while 35.5% showed a decrease, contributing to an effect of -1.01 ppts and the remaining 11.8% had no change in price. The prices of goods increased by 5.1% and caused an influence of 2.88 ppts. The prices of services showed an increase of 1.8% and had an influence of 0.77 ppts.

Subsistence level Over the last 12 months,

the subsistence level for a household consisting of two (2) adults and two (2) children (aged 0-15 years) registered an increase of Afl. 150. This increase was mainly due to increases in the "Food and non-alcoholic beverages" (Afl. 82) and "Transport" (Afl. 41) sectors.

Change in prices of crude oil, utilities, gasoline and diesel

The average price per barrel of crude oil registered an increase of US\$ 24.63 (52.7%) from US\$ 46.78 in December 2020 to US\$ 71.41 in December 2021. The energy index increased by 9.3% over the past 12 months. The indices of "Gasoline" and "Diesel" registered increases of respectively, 35.3% and 42.2% over the last year, contributing together with an effect of 1.42 ppts. The indices of the other two components of energy ("Electricity" and "Water") did not change over the past 12 months. The remaining 404 goods and services, as a group, show an increase of 2.6% and had an effect of 2.23 ppts on the CPI. Change in prices of Food & catering services Over the last 12 months, the "Food & catering services" increased by 3.8%. The "Food at home" index showed an increase of 4.3%, where all of the "Food at home" food groups increased over the period. The "Oils and fats" index increased by 15.2%, the largest increase among the "Food at home" food groups. Furthermore, other significant increases were posted in the indices for "Fruit" (10.2%), "Meat" (7.1%), "Potatoes and other tubers" (5.6%), "Fish and other seafood" (3.2%) and "Bread and cereals" (2.4%). The index for "Food away from home" increased by 2.7% over the last 12 months. □

For a more details report go to www.cbs.aw

The history of Aruba

ORANJESTAD — Many of our visitors consider our One Happy Island as their home away from home, so we thought it is a good idea for you to know the history of Aruba. Here's our story in a nutshell.

What's in a name

Most probably, the name Aruba is of Indian origin, a combination of ora (shell) and oubao (island). But it might also be from Spanish: oro hubo (there was gold). The earliest mention on a map spells Orua.

The pre-Columbian era

Before the discovery of Aruba by the Spaniards, the island was inhabited by Indians, first by the Arawaks and later the Caribs. They lived of catching fish and collecting natural food.

The Spaniards, the Dutch and the English

Aruba was discovered by the Spaniards in 1499. In the 16th century, the Spaniards deported the entire Indian population and sent them away to the island of Hispaniola to work in copper mines. In the 17th century, the Dutch conquered the Windward islands. On Aruba horses and mainly goats were bred. Between 1806 and 1816, Aruba was occupied by the English.

Aloe, gold and phosphate

De aloe plant was particularly suitable for the soil and the climate of Aruba. As of the 19th century, the juice is exported and since 1947 there is an aloe factory on Aruba. In 1824, gold was found on Aruba and phosphate in 1859. Both industries were the first important source of income for the Aruban people. De gold digging continued up to the First World War (1914) and the exploitation of phosphate was also halted in the beginning of the 20th century.

The Lago

The most important change in the past century for Aruba was the establishment of the Lago Oil and Transport Company. The founding of this refinery prompted the need of foreign labor and they came mainly from the English speaking islands in the Caribbean. They established

themselves in San Nicolas. In 1986, the outdated Lago closed but the refinery was soon reopened by another oil company.

Aruba and World War II

Aruba was home to one of the biggest refineries in the world, supplying a substantial part of the fuel to the allied troops. That's why the island was targeted by a German submarine. Fortunately, the attack was a major failure. Aruba had been spared massive damage.

Striving for Separation

In the beginning of the thirties of the past century, Aruba officially announced to the Government of the Dutch Kingdom its wish to separate from Curaçao. Jan Hendrik (Henny) Eman and Shon A Eman were the advocates of 'Separación' (separation).

The struggle for 'Status Aparte'

In the course of the seventies, a movement came about that aimed to dissolve Aruba from the administrative unit of the Netherlands Antilles. After a couple of turbulent weeks in August 1977, the call for independence was recognized by the Dutch government, which resulted in obtaining the so-called 'Status Aparte': in 1986, Aruba became an independent country within the Dutch Kingdom.

Betico Croes

The young and dynamic politician Gilberto François ('Betico') Croes from Santa Cruz founded the political party Movimiento Electoral di Pueblo (MEP) in 1971. As leader of this party, he was an advocate of the realization of the 'Status Aparte' for Aruba in the seventies and eighties. He died in the year the Status Aparte took effect, 1986

Tourism

In 1959, the first major resort on Palm Beach was constructed. Next to the Aruba Caribbean Hotel, other so-called High-rise hotels were built. Several smaller hotels were built as well, like those on Eagle Beach. Tourism has grown to become the major employer on the island, next to the refinery. Source: <http://www.historiadiaruba.aw/>. □

Intel building \$20B Ohio chip facility amid global shortage

By JOHN SEEWER and ANDREW WELSH-HUGGINS Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — Intel will invest \$20 billion in a new computer chip facility in Ohio amid a global shortage of microprocessors used in everything from phones and cars to video games.

After years of heavy reliance on Asia for the production of computer chips, vulnerability to shortages of the crucial components was exposed in the U.S. and Europe as they began to emerge economically from the pandemic.

The U.S. share of the worldwide chip manufacturing market has declined from 37% in 1990 to 12% today, according to the Semiconductor Industry Association, and shortages have become a potential risk.

Two chip factories on the 1,000-acre site in Licking County, just east of Columbus, are expected to create 3,000 company jobs and 7,000 construction jobs, and to support tens of thousands of additional jobs for suppliers and partners, the company and local and state officials announced Friday.

Construction is expected to begin this year, with production coming online at the end of 2025.

Shortages of chips have crimped the ability of U.S. automakers to produce vehicles and last year, General Motors was unseated by Toyota as the nation's



top-selling automaker for the first time.

The U.S. and Europe are pushing to aggressively to build chip making capacity and reduce reliance on producers that are now mostly based in Asia.

Most big semiconductor companies are dependent on chips produced in Asia, particularly in Taiwan, which China has long claimed as its own territory. Taiwan leads the world in chipmaking, accounting for 22% of global manufacturing capacity, followed by South Korea with 21%, and Japan and mainland China each with 15%, according to the SIA.

Several chipmakers last year signaled an interest in expanding their American operations if the U.S. government is able to make it easier to build chip plants.

Chipmakers are diversifying their manufacturing sites in response to the shortages. Samsung said in November it plans to build a \$17 billion factory outside of Austin, Texas.

Micron Technology, based in Boise, Idaho, said it will invest \$150 billion globally over the next decade in developing its line of memory chips, with a potential U.S. manufacturing expansion if tax credits can help make up for the higher costs of American manufacturing.

However, demand for computer chips continues to grow.

Lawmakers have been urging House and Senate leaders to fully fund a law meant to address the semiconductor chip shortage. They want Congress to fully fund the \$52 billion CHIPS

for America Act, allowing for stateside investment in semiconductor factories. Not only has the chip shortage disrupted the U.S. economy, it is creating a vulnerability in the country's defense system since eight of every 10 chips are produced in Asia, lawmakers say.

Separate federal legislation also under consideration would create a new tax credit for investment in semiconductor manufacturing facilities.

Shortages during the pandemic highlighted the need for more manufacturing capacity in the U.S. and for becoming less reliant on Asia, said Glenn O'Donnell, an analyst at Forrester Research.

"Your two biggest producers are Taiwan and South Korea and both are vul-

nerable spots on the world stage," he said.

U.S. Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo applauded the announcement.

"Intel's work is essential to our efforts to rebuild America's chip building capacity and create the kinds of good-paying jobs that support a vibrant American economy," she said.

The Intel project is the largest single private-sector investment in Ohio's history, on par with an agreement in 1977 that brought Honda to central Ohio, where it now employs more than 14,000 people. The Intel jobs are expected to pay an average of \$135,000 a year plus benefits, with the project slated to add \$2.8 billion to the state's annual gross product, Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine said in a statement.

"Intel's new facilities will be transformative for our state, creating thousands of good-paying jobs in Ohio manufacturing strategically vital semiconductors," DeWine said.

Intel, based in Santa Clara, Calif., announced plans last year to spend \$20 billion for two new factories in Arizona. It's also pitching for European subsidies to build a big plant somewhere within the European Union and last month said it will invest \$7.1 billion to expand its decades-old manufacturing operation in Malaysia, home to roughly 10% of the company's global workforce. □

GM renovating NY factory so it can make electric motor parts

LOCKPORT, N.Y. (AP) — General Motors says it will spend about \$154 million to revamp an aging factory near Buffalo, New York, so it can make a key part for electric vehicle motors.

The automaker says it will add about 230 jobs at the factory in Lockport, about 30 miles (48 kilometers) northeast of Buffalo, to build stator modules, the part that creates a magnetic field to turn the motor. The part will go into mo-

tors for new electric trucks and SUVs.

In addition to renovation, the money will go toward buying and installing equipment needed to make the new part.

Currently the Lockport plant has about 1,500 workers who make radiators, condensers, heater cores, oil coolers and other parts for internal combustion engines in trucks and SUVs. The new positions would be filled between 2023 and

2026, the company said in a statement.

GM says renovations to the plant will begin immediately. The plant built in 1910 will keep building combustion engine parts.

GM has set a goal of selling only electric passenger vehicles by 2035. It plans to spend \$35 billion to roll out more than 30 new battery vehicles globally by 2025 as it aims to unseat Tesla as the electric vehicle sales leader. □



CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 40 Not out
 - 1 Church event
 - 5 Eccentric fellow
 - 9 Wash against
 - 10 Entices
 - 12 Make amends
 - 13 Site of action
 - 14 Denver team
 - 16 Like some Pride
 - Parade participants
 - 17 Before, to bards
 - 18 Detroit team
 - 20 Intensify
 - 22 Aware of
 - 23 Camera creator
 - Land
 - 25 NBA players
 - 28 Relaxed
 - 32 Toronto team
 - 34 Power, in old Rome
 - 35 Poem of praise
 - 36 Boston team
 - 38 Singer Shore

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Yesterday's answer

DOWN

- 1 Full grown
- 2 Orbital point
- 3 Joined the choir
- 4 Soaked in hot water
- 5 Elegance
- 6 Possessive word
- 7 Trail Blazers' state
- 8 Lease signer
- 9 Like Olympic pools
- 11 Authority
- 15 Old dishes
- 19 Muscle quality
- 21 Nuisance
- 24 "I should be going"
- 25 Eggs on
- 26 Hams' needs
- 27 "Let me in!"
- 29 Take wing
- 30 Nauseate
- 31 Road curves
- 33 Earthy color
- 37 Lacking depth
- 39 Simile center

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1-22

AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's. X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

1-22

CRYPTOQUOTE

L Q G C N V K D W M G K U C Q G C H N
U H Q K V H Q Z H D K T C X . K
A V K M M . S B Q X C G K U C H Q H D
Q G C S B V J L T L B N Y C L Y V C .

— X K V Q X G H Q E K D

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: KINDLY WORDS DO NOT ENTER SO DEEPLY INTO MEN AS A REPUTATION FOR KINDNESS. — MENCIVS

Think your home value is soaring? Talk to a farmer



By SCOTT McFETRIDGE

Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Fourth-generation corn and soybean farmer Jeff Frank doesn't feel rich, but simply based on the skyrocketing value of his land in northwest Iowa, it's an apt way to describe him, even if he laughs at the idea.

He lives in the same nearly century-old house, grows veggies in the family garden and shops at the same grocery store about 15 miles (24 kilometers) down the road. "We live the same way we have all of our lives," he said.

Still, even if Frank's life hasn't changed, the several hundred acres he owns about 80 miles (129 kilometers) northwest of Des Moines have suddenly made him worth millions of dollars.

It may come as a surprise to city dwellers excited by their home values that countless farmers like Frank are actually experiencing a real estate boom that makes residential prices pale in comparison. While median existing-home prices rose by 15.8% in the U.S. last year, farmland values went up about double that rate in places like Iowa.

"I'm definitely surprised by the magnitude," said Wen-

dong Zhang, an economist at Iowa State University who oversees an annual farmland value survey.

The rising values, especially in the Midwest, are due to high prices being paid for the key commodity crops of corn and soybeans, plentiful harvests in recent years coupled with low interest rates and optimism the good times will continue.

But they're a mixed blessing. They're enriching farmers who already have a lot of land, but making it much harder for small operators or younger farmers starting out to get land unless they happen to inherit it.

Most purchases are by operations that see the value of larger scale, seizing the chance to buy nearby land.

"If you miss this opportunity, you may not get another chance," Zhang said, describing the current mood. As for consumers, higher land costs typically don't affect grocery prices.

Historically, farmland values rise and fall, but in the past couple decades they have mostly risen, and in the past year they have risen a lot 33% in Frank's part of the state and 29% throughout Iowa, one of the nation's top agricultural

states. Agricultural prices also have soared elsewhere in the Midwest and have climbed in most other parts of the country, too.

Federal Reserve Banks in Chicago and Kansas City reported double-digit increases in Illinois, Wisconsin, Indiana, Missouri and Nebraska.

In Iowa, average farmland has risen from \$7,559 an acre in 2020 to \$9,751 an acre in 2021.

Nationally, farmland was up an average of 7% but that doesn't include the last half of 2021, when prices really took off in many areas.

Farm land prices have even climbed in California despite concerns about persistent drought. In 2021, the average prices of \$10,900 an acre was up 9% from 2020.

The land purchases augment an existing national trend of more agricultural production coming from ever-larger farms.

Dan Sumner, an agricultural economist at the University of California-Davis, credits some of the rising value in switching to higher-value crops, such as replacing alfalfa with nut trees.

Overall, though, Sumner said farmers are feeling good about their future.

"It reflects confidence in the economics of agriculture," he said.

The upswing follows tumultuous years of trade wars, market breakdowns due to the coronavirus pandemic and drought in much of the West.

For individual farmers, the biggest benefit of rising values is that they can borrow money at better rates for annual needs like seed and fertilizer and longer-term investments like tractors and even more land.

The high prices have prompted plenty of people to buy and sell land, leading to a record of \$765 million in agricultural land sales last year overseen by Farmers National Company, one of the nation's largest landowner services companies. □

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Meat Loaf, 'Bat Out of Hell' rock superstar, dies at 74

By HILLEL ITALIE
AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Meat Loaf, the heavyweight rock superstar loved by millions for his "Bat Out of Hell" album and for such theatrical, dark-hearted anthems as "Paradise By the Dashboard Light," "Two Out of Three Ain't Bad," and "I'd Do Anything for Love (But I Won't Do That)," has died. He was 74.

The singer born Marvin Lee Aday died Thursday, according to a family statement provided by his longtime agent Michael Greene.

"Our hearts are broken to announce that the incomparable Meat Loaf passed away tonight," the statement said. "We know how much he meant to so many of you and we truly appreciate all of the love and support as we move through this time of grief in losing such an inspiring artist and beautiful man... From his heart to your souls... don't ever stop rocking!" No cause or other details were given, but Aday had numerous health scares over the years.

"Bat Out of Hell," his mega-selling collaboration with songwriter Jim Steinman and producer Todd Rundgren, came out in 1977 and made him one of the most recognizable performers in rock.

Fans fell hard for the roaring vocals of the long-haired, 250-plus pound singer and for the comic non-romance of the title track, "You Took The Words Right Out of My Mouth," "Two Out of Three Ain't Bad" and "Paradise By the Dashboard Light," an operatic cautionary tale about going all the way.

"Paradise" was a duet with Ellen Foley that featured play-by-play from New York Yankees broadcaster Phil Rizzuto, who alleged — to much skepticism — that he was unaware of any alternate meanings to reaching third base and heading for home.

After a slow start and mixed reviews, "Bat Out of Hell" became one of the top-selling albums in history, with worldwide sales

of more than 40 million copies. Meat Loaf wasn't a consistent hit maker, especially after falling out for years with Steinman. But he maintained close ties with his fans through his manic live shows, social media and his many television, radio and film appearances, including "Fight Club" and cameos on "Glee" and "South Park."

Friends and fans mourned his death on social media. "I hope paradise is as you remember it from the dashboard light, Meat Loaf," actor Stephen Fry said on Twitter. Andrew Lloyd Webber tweeted: "The vaults of heaven will be ringing with rock." And Adam Lambert called Meat Loaf: "A gentle hearted powerhouse rock star forever and ever. You were so kind. Your music will always be iconic."

Meat Loaf's biggest musical success after "Bat Out of Hell" was "Bat Out of Hell II: Back into Hell," a 1993 reunion with Steinman that sold more than 15 million copies and featured the Grammy-winning single "I'd Do Anything for Love (But I Won't Do That)."

Steinman died in April.

Aday's other albums included "Bat Out of Hell III: The Monster is Loose," "Hell in a Handbasket" and "Braver Than We Are." His songs included "Dead Ringer for Love" with Cher and she shared on Twitter that she "had so much fun" on the duet. "Am very sorry for



his family, friends and fans." A native of Dallas, Aday was the son of a school teacher who raised him on her own after divorcing his alcoholic father, a police officer. Aday was singing and acting in high school (Mick Jagger was an early favorite, so was Ethel Merman) and attended Lubbock Christian College and what is now the University of North Texas. Among his more notable childhood memories: Seeing John F. Kennedy arrive at Love Field in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963, then learning the president had been assassinated and driving to Parkland Hospital and watching a bloodied Jackie Kennedy step out of a car. He was still a teenager when his mother died and when he acquired the nickname Meat Loaf, the alleged origins of which range from his weight to a favorite recipe of his mother's. He left for Los Angeles after college and was soon

fronting the band Meat Loaf Soul. For years, he alternated between music and the stage, recording briefly for Motown, opening for such acts as the Who and the Grateful Dead and appearing in the Broadway production of "Hair." □

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In 3-week isolation, unvaccinated athlete waits for Olympics

By JAMES ELLINGWORTH AP Sports Writer

Three weeks alone in a hotel room is hardly an ideal setting for a snowboarder preparing for the Olympics. Patrizia Kummer, a Swiss athlete who won a gold medal at the 2014 Sochi Olympics, is unvaccinated against the coronavirus, so she is spending 21 days in isolation in China before the Winter Games begin in Beijing on Feb. 4.

Even though vaccine rules are strict for the upcoming Olympics, a few unvaccinated athletes will still be taking part.

Kummer said she doesn't want to influence anyone else's views on vaccination and thinks the quarantine requirement is fair, but also declined to discuss her "personal reasons" for refusing a vaccine.

"I had a bunch of reasons for the vaccine and a bunch of reasons against the vaccine, and in the end, it was like, 'No, I can't do it,'" she said on a video call from her Beijing hotel room, adding she is "not in a risk group."

The coronavirus can cause disease and death in



younger people, including athletes. Scientists believe vaccinating as many people as possible will help slow the virus' spread, which will help in preventing the emergence of new variants and in building immunity more broadly in the population.

When Kummer competes on Feb. 8 in her third Olym-

pics, she will have been in China for nearly a month. Some countries have refused to select unvaccinated athletes for their Olympic teams. Other athletes have a choice between vaccination or the 21-day quarantine. A few will compete unvaccinated without quarantine after getting exemptions on medi-

cal or legal grounds. That includes some young Russian athletes who weren't eligible for vaccines at home.

VACCINE OR QUARANTINE Kummer is staying in a Holiday Inn in northern Beijing, far from the mountains where some Olympic events will be held. Food is brought to her door three

times a day, there's a stationary bike for exercise, and she brought a yoga mat, weights and fitness equipment.

When she's not working out, Kummer visualizes riding the snowboard she has propped against the wall, streams TV shows or works on her plans to renovate a historic building back home in Switzerland.

That's life in what the International Olympic Committee calls the "dedicated facility" for unvaccinated athletes waiting to enter the "closed loop" of the Beijing Olympics.

"I'm a minimalist, so I don't need much to have a good living. I don't need much to be happy. So that's no problem," Kummer said. "And I actually enjoy being by myself."

Kummer thinks she's the only unvaccinated athlete in quarantine, but doesn't know for sure. The IOC declined to say whether there are others, saying only that "close to 100% of the residents of the Olympic and Paralympic Villages" will be vaccinated. Nearly 3,000 athletes are expected at the Beijing Games. □

Red Sox slugger Ortiz on track for baseball hall election

By JIMMY GOLEN

BOSTON (AP) — Boston's Big Papi appears headed to the Baseball Hall of Fame — no last-minute walk-off needed.

The Red Sox slugger looks to be on track for induction in Cooperstown this summer, riding the strength of his on- and off-field achievements to overcome stigmas that have stalled or derailed the

candidacies of some of his predecessors.

Namely, Ortiz appears to have bucked anti-designated hitter sentiment that has been blunted by the inductions of Frank Thomas, Edgar Martinez and Harold Baines. And Ortiz's lone reported positive for performance-enhancing drugs — on an expected anonymous 2003 survey test lack-

ing the usual due process — seems to be hurting him less than the more substantial evidence against candidates like Barry Bonds, Roger Clemens and Alex Rodriguez.

Through Friday, Ortiz had been named on 84% of the ballots revealed at the bbhottracker.com website maintained by former Oakland Athletics fan Ryan Thibodeaux and his number-crunching minions. A candidate needs 75% for induction; totals traditionally go down when the final numbers are released.

Clemens and Bonds, all-time greats whose accomplishments are tainted by steroid use, were barely above the threshold in their 10th and final appearance on the baseball writers' ballot.

The Hall will announce the results of the BBWAA vote

on Tuesday, and anyone elected to the Class of 2022 will join Gil Hodges, Jim Kaat, Minnie Miñoso, Tony Oliva, Bud Fowler and Buck O'Neil, who were elected by the Hall's era committees.

A 10-time All-Star, Ortiz batted .286 with 541 homers and 1,768 RBIs in a career that started with the Twins before they released him to avoid a big payday in arbitration. After arriving in Boston, he finished in the top five of the AL MVP balloting for each the next five seasons; he came in sixth in his final year, 2016, when he batted .315 with 38 homers and 127 RBIs for what may be the best walk-off season in baseball history.

But Ortiz's case is also buttressed by his contributions in big moments, with 23 game-winning hits in his career — three of them dur-

ing the 2004 postseason, when he helped Boston end its 86-year World Series drought. He led the team to two more titles after that, including 2013, when he helped his "(expletive) city" heal after the Boston Marathon bombing and then batted .688 against the Cardinals to win the World Series MVP.

But his outsized personality may also be helping voters to overlook factors that have scuttled others' Hall of Fame candidacies.

Designated hitters received a rough greeting on the ballot until Thomas was elected in 2014 as the first player who spent more time at DH than in the field. Martinez, for whom the top DH award is named, joined him in Cooperstown on his 10th and final try in 2019 after starting just 28% of the time as a position player. □



Bills headed to KC for high-profile AFC title game rematch

By DAVE SKRETTA

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) —

Stefon Diggs walked off the field inside Arrowhead Stadium back in October with two very distinct feelings: elation that his Bills had avenged an AFC title game loss to the Chiefs and the conviction that they would meet again. Get ready for the latest throw-down between two of the league's best teams Sunday night.

Fresh off a near-perfect 47-17 blowout of New England last weekend, Diggs and the Bills are headed back to Kansas City for the divisional round of the playoffs. And awaiting them are Patrick Mahomes and the high-flying Chiefs, who turned around their season after a lackluster start and then throttled Pittsburgh 42-21 in their wild-card matchup.

"They've got all the talent in the world," Diggs said. "They've been playing at a high level. They've been to the Super Bowl twice. They have a hell of a quar-



terback, hell of receivers, good defense — they're a great team."

Turns out he wasn't the only one that anticipated another showdown, either.

"We'll probably play them a lot of times. It'll be great competition," Mahomes said, "and it's definitely going to be a great challenge for us as a team to com-

pete with them."

Indeed, it's difficult to find a game with more star power than this one.

Josh Allen threw five TD passes against the Patriots to set a Bills playoff record, while Diggs and resurgent running back Devin Singletary give him plenty of playmakers. On the other side, the Buffalo defense featur-

ing All-Pro safety Jordan Poyer and running mate Micah Hyde led the league in just about every meaningful statistical category. Buffalo, which has lost eight consecutive playoff games away from home, scored on each of its first seven drives against the Patriots and became the first NFL team to finish a playoff

game with no punts, field goals or turnovers.

"It's tough to have a perfect game," Chiefs coach Andy Reid said, "and they did a nice job with it last week."

As for the Chiefs? Well, they've merely won their past five playoff games at Arrowhead Stadium.

Mahomes became the first player to throw for at least 400 yards and five touchdowns with fewer than 10 incompletions in the post-season in last week's romp past Pittsburgh. His familiar targets, Travis Kelce and Tyreek Hill, did most of the work while the suddenly stout Kansas City defense held the Steelers to 44 yards in the first half.

Throw in the fact that both teams are intimately familiar with each other — Bills coach Sean McDermott even spent most of his formative years working for Reid in Philadelphia — and the stage is set for a riveting matchup.

"We don't want to have that feeling that we had there last year. □

N.Y. Giants name Joe Schoen of Buffalo Bills as their new GM

By TOM CANAVAN AP Sports Writer

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. (AP) —

The New York Giants have hired Buffalo Bills assistant general manager Joe Schoen as their new general manager.

Co-owners John Mara and Steve Tisch made the announcement Friday, a little more than a week after a starting a search in which they interviewed nine candidates in the first round and gave three a second interview.

"Throughout our search, Joe impressed us with his ability to communicate a progressive and comprehensive vision for our team," Mara said. "His philosophy and collaborative approach to building a roster and coaching staff align with what we were looking for in a general manager." Schoen got the nod over San Francisco 49ers assistant general manager Adam Peters and Kansas City's executive director

of player personnel Ryan Poles.

Schoen faces a major rebuilding process. The Giants have made the playoffs once since winning the Super Bowl in February 2012. They have had five straight double-digit losing seasons, including a 4-13 record this past season.

His first job will be to find a coach to replace Joe Judge, who was fired last week after posting a 10-23 in two seasons. Interviews probably will start next week.

The 42-year-old Schoen should be able to help the team in the draft. New York will have the fifth and seventh picks overall.

The GM job opened on Jan. 10, when 70-year-old Dave Gettleman retired after posting a 19-46 record in four seasons. The 40-year-old Judge, who raised expectations with a 6-10 first season, was fired the next day after an injury plagued, disappointing

season that ended with six straight losses.

The Giants started interviewing for the general manager's job two days after Gettleman retired and spoke virtually with nine candidates. Schoen battled leadoff and stayed there.

Schoen got a second interview at the Giants team headquarters on Tuesday, followed by Poles of the Chiefs on Wednesday and Peters on Thursday.

Schoen has 20 years of scouting and executive experience in the NFL, including the past five with the Bills. He spent most of the previous decade with the Miami Dolphins' front office. Schoen's first NFL job was as a ticket office intern with the Carolina Panthers in 2000. He spent seven seasons (2001-07) working for the Panthers under current Bills general manager Brandon Beane.

The Giants have gone through four coaches since

2016, the year Ben McDoo was hired. He led the Giants to their only playoff berth but he was fired the next year in the midst of a 3-13 season that included the benching of Eli Manning.

Pat Shurmur was hired in 2018 and went 9-23 before being fired after two seasons. The trend continued under Judge, a former New England special teams coordinator.

Schoen will be the team's fifth general manager since 1979, when Hall of Famer George Young started the process of turning around

the stumbling franchise. He led the Giants to eight playoff berths and two Super Bowl titles before leaving in 1998 to join the NFL front office. Ernie Accorsi ran the club from 1998-06, hiring coach Tom Coughlin in 2004 and laying the groundwork for two more titles. Jerry Reese got the job in 2007 and combined with Coughlin to win Super Bowls after the '07 and '11 seasons. Gettleman was hired after McDoo and Reese were fired in December 2017 following the debacle of benching Manning. □



MATCHDAY: Man City can strengthen title bid at Southampton

The Associated Press undefined

A look at what's happening in European soccer on Saturday:

ENGLAND

Manchester City heads to Southampton seeking a 13th straight win to move 14 points clear in the Premier League. Liverpool and Chelsea — the teams in second and third place, respectively — do not play until Sunday so City can

strengthen its status as the big favorite for a sixth title in 11 seasons. Southampton has posed problems for City in recent years, though, and has drawn at Etihad Stadium already this season. Manchester United could move into fourth place, if only for a day, by winning at home to West Ham, which currently occupies that position. Duncan Ferguson takes charge of the first game of his sec-

ond spell as Everton's caretaker manager in a home match against Aston Villa, while Newcastle travels to Leeds and Brentford hosts Wolverhampton.

SPAIN

Sevilla can move closer to Spanish league leader Real Madrid with a win at home against Celta Vigo. Sevilla is four points behind Madrid, which hosts Elche on Sunday. Sevilla is unbeaten in seven consecutive league

games, with five wins and two draws that came against Barcelona and Valencia. Celta has won three of its last four league games. Defending champion Atlético Madrid hopes to end its poor run when it hosts Valencia. Diego Simeone's team is coming off eliminations to Athletic Bilbao in the Spanish Super Cup semifinals and to Real Sociedad in the round of 16 of the Copa del Rey. Atlético

has lost four of its last six league matches and is 16 points behind Madrid with a game in hand. Also Saturday, last-place Levante hosts Cádiz and Mallorca visits Villarreal.

ITALY

Serie A leader Inter Milan's match against Venezia could be postponed due to a coronavirus outbreak on Venezia. The promoted squad has eight players positive with COVID-19. Inter could use the rest after needing extra time to beat Empoli in the Italian Cup on Wednesday. Also, Lazio hosts Atalanta and Udinese visits Genoa, which has new coach Alexander Blessin making his debut after Andriy Shevchenko was fired.

GERMANY

Borussia Dortmund visits Hoffenheim in the Bundesliga seeking a win to reduce the six-point gap to leader Bayern Munich. Dortmund coach Marco Rose has challenged his team to be more consistent after crashing out of the German Cup to second-division St. Pauli on Tuesday. Hoffenheim is fourth and chasing a Champions League spot. Third-place Bayer Leverkusen ended a four-game winless run in the league by beating Borussia Mönchengladbach last week and now hosts struggling Augsburg. Gladbach coach Adi Hütter is under pressure with his team in 12th ahead of a visit from Union Berlin. Freiburg hosts Stuttgart, last-place Greuther Fürth plays Mainz and Bochum takes on Cologne.

FRANCE

Third-place Marseille travels up north to take on Lens with new striker Cedric Bakambu available to try and fix the team's attacking shortcomings. Bakambu scored 48 goals in 71 appearances for Chinese Super League club Beijing Guoan before joining the nine-time French champions. With Arkadiusz Milik struggling for form, Marseille has been lacking firepower, managing just 28 goals in 20 matches so far.

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